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ABSTRACT

This Issuegram briefly discusses the role of the school in the prevention and minimization of drug use problems. Two approaches to the problem are considered: the disciplinary approach that concerns the behavior of school personnel confronted with drug activity on school property, and the pedagogical/or educational approach. The roles of the state education agency and the state alcohol and drug authority are also discussed. The Issuegram outlines other strategies for preventing drug abuse that can supplement school programs, including alternative activities, peer counseling, adult influence, and reinforcement of positive behavior. Additional resources and suggested readings are listed. (JAC)

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SCHOOL PROGRAMS TO
PREVENT DRUG ABUSE

Issuegram 18

Mary Noak

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This Issuegram was prepared on January 3, 1983, by Mary Noak, ECS consultant. For more detail, call Russ Vlaanderen at 303-830-3800.

18. School Programs To Prevent Drug Abuse

The Issue

> The role of the school in the prevention and minimization of drug use problems is not a choice of action or inaction, but, rather, a choice of acting purposefully and systematically or sporadically and inconsistently.

In these words the Minnesota Department of Education presents one of the major challenges facing educators today: defining the role of the school in preventing drug abuse. Growing public concern over the use of harmful substances by school-age children is reflected in the evolution of a strong and vocal parent movement, renewed political interest in the drug problem and increased media attention to its consequences. Drug abuse is detrimental to the individual child's physical, intellectual and emotional development and it seriously compromises the teaching and learning environment. Directly and indirectly, drug abuse undermines the traditional goals of education by disrupting the educational process. What can educators do to prevent alcohol and drug abuse, thereby preserving the quality and integrity of the educational process?

School Programs

It appears that school systems have taken two approaches to the problem. The disciplinary approach is concerned with appropriate behavior of school personnel confronted by drug abuse or drug peddling on school property. The pedagogical approach is concerned with education -- with informing students about the effects of drugs and why they are used, and with facilitating the development of skills and attitudes that will enable young people to manage their lives without drugs.

Thus, at one end of the policy spectrum, schools react to issues of supply control, law enforcement, punishment, intervention and referral of students with drug problems. At the other end of the spectrum, schools take an active role in decreasing the demand for drugs.

State Roles in School Programs

Two state agencies, the state education agency and the state alcohol and drug authority, have taken an active role in assisting local school districts to design and develop alcohol and drug education programs and substance abuse policies.

Education codes in 43 states require or recommend that health education be included in the public school curriculum, at all grade levels. Instruction about the effects of alcohol and other drugs on health is the most commonly specified topic in education statutes, and alcohol and drug education is widely accepted as an integral part of a comprehensive health education program.

Education agencies in 47 states employ health education specialists who provide technical assistance in program planning and development and who make resources like curriculum guides available to local school systems. In addition, prevention coordinators in 48 state alcohol and drug agencies provide speakers, materials, and training assistance through a network of local professionals.

Fourteen state education agencies and six state alcohol and drug authorities have developed policy guidelines or suggested policies to assist local districts in formulating their own substance abuse policies. In a number of other states these agencies are involved in a variety of policy development assistance activities such as convening forums to discuss issues, referring districts to materials, training and other resources, and participating in the local policy

development process.

School Efforts Raise Difficult Questions

A policy issue for states is whether school drug prevention programs improve the quality of education.

Supporters assume that prevention programs will decrease the use of drugs on school property, which will in turn prevent disruptions in the educational process. But skeptics question whether schools can really influence a student with an abuse pattern. It is unlikely, they say, that school experience, however positive, can negate countervailing peer and cultural influences.

Also at issue is the content of education programs. What kinds of information should be presented to children, and how? Should schools use affective education approaches, programs and curricula that address the psychosocial developmental characteristics correlated with drug abuse (i.e., self concept, decision-making, problem-solving, interpersonal communications)? There are some that would argue that this type of education infringes on parental roles and responsibilities.

Questions also arise about drug policies. What is the school's primary responsibility: to enforce the law or to help the individual student? When and how should a student be confronted with drug use? How can we protect the rights of students, teachers and parents in a drug abuse situation?

Schools Cannot Take Full Responsibility

It is unrealistic to expect the schools alone to solve the drug abuse problem, since numerous outside factors also influence behavior regarding drugs. Very little of what schools do will be effective unless school programs are supplemented by the educational efforts of parents, the media, businesses, and community agencies.

Additional Prevention Strategies

Outlined below are other strategies for preventing drug abuse that can supplement school programs.

o Alternative activities Community agencies can play an important role in preventing drug abuse by seeking to involve youth in alternative activities such as youth-run businesses, sports and physical fitness programs, art, music and religion. These types of activities require time and personal commitments and often result in the formation of strong peer groups that may inhibit drug use. Such alternatives need to be publicized and supported both philosophically and financially.

o Peer counselling and support programs From junior high school on, peer groups are the primary influence on behavior. In peer support programs, specially trained children help their peers through difficult problems. These programs, which can be based in a variety of community agencies, provide troubled youth with empathy and demonstrate that there are positive, constructive approaches to handling problems.

o Examples set by adults The influence of adults who practice good health habits, demonstrate strong coping skills and respect themselves and others can be an invaluable part of a child's education.

o Reinforcement of positive behavior The media, employers and community agencies can all help support attitudes and behavior that will diminish the need for drugs and will help children learn how to resist peer pressure. An important aspect of positive reinforcement is recognizing the achievements of young people. Too often the negative behavior of children is highly publicized, whereas the personal achievements and community service of school children receives too little support and visibility.

Resources

Federal and State Agencies

Prevention Branch, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 5600 Fishers Lane, Room 16C10, Rockville, Maryland 20857.

Prevention Branch, National Institute on Drug Abuse, 5600 Fishers Lane, Room 11A33, Rockville, Maryland 20857.

The PYRAMID Project (N.I.D.A.), 7101 Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 1006, Bethesda, Maryland 20014. (A resource sharing

network for drug abuse prevention, PYRAMID provides information and technical assistance in program planning and development.)

Your state alcohol and drug authority.

Your state education agency.

Your state health department (specifically the health promotion and risk reduction sections).

Your state mental health agency.

What to Read

Education Commission of the States, State Policy Support for School Health Education: A Review and Analysis, Denver, Colorado: ECS, 1982. ERIC No. ED 218274 (Not available from ECS)

Education Commission of the States, State Roles in Alcohol Abuse Prevention and Intervention Programs, Denver, Colorado: ECS, (1982).*

National Research Council, Alcohol and Public Policy: Beyond the Shadow of Prohibition, Panel on Alternative Policies Affecting the Prevention of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, Washington D.C.: National Academy Press, 1981.

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U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, School Drug Abuse Policy Development Guide: For School and Community Officials, Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, D.E.A., 1978.

U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, School Drug Abuse Policy Guidelines: A Handbook for Policy Development for Educators and Criminal Justice Personnel. Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, D.E.A., 1978.

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